

FASHIONABLE EDUCATION OF GIRLS.

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The instruction given at school, is almost purely intellectual; the senses receive little regular training; the power is used in very moderate degrees to aid the mind—yet they are the first teachers of the young. Grammar, history, definition, composition, call for simple intellectual exertion—the natural sciences are very slenderly illustrated by sensible examples, and the poor engravings in the text books are often the only illustration they receive. The most obtruse subjects, that tax the attention of the strongest mental powers, are presented as studies for the young: girls of 13 or 15 are called upon to ponder the problems of *mental and moral philosophy*, to demonstrate the *propositions of Euclid*, to understand the refinements of *rhetoric and logic*—admirable studies, truly, but they are the food

of mature minds, not suitable to children. “The Logic of the Schools,” once signified the acutest efforts of powerful intellects—in our day it has a very different meaning!

There is no end to the list of “English branches,” which the child has to “go through” during the few years of school training; the enumeration would have frightened our most studious ancestors; they did not understand what is meant by “going through the English branches;” they in their simplicity supposed that there was some use attached to every study—that it must be acquired thoroughly, and be made either a means of mental discipline, or an object of investigation and discovery. But it would puzzle the most ingenious observer, to discover the good use of most of our children’s studies. If the object be mental discipline, there is no surer way of defeating such an object, than to attempt to give the mind a superficial view of a subject too difficult for it to grasp—to confuse it with a multitude of disconnected studies—to hurry it from subject to subject, so that the simple studies more suited to the young mind, are imperfectly acquired, and soon forgotten. Thus the greater part of the time devoted to the so-called cultivation of the intellect is really wasted: and it is no uncommon thing to find the young girl who has gone through all the English branches, quite unable to write a lady-like note, or read aloud a single page with right emphasis, ease and accuracy.

How can it be otherwise, when the young mind has to apply itself, during the limited term of school-study, to such a list of subjects as the following: Grammar, Ancient and Modern History, Natural Philosophy, Chemistry, Botany, Astronomy, Mental and Moral Philosophy, Physiology, Rhetoric, Composition, Elocution, Logic, Algebra, Geometry, Belles-Lettres!

The teacher is not to blame for this wretched system of cramming. He is compelled to present as formidable an array of knowledge to be acquired at his school, as his neighbors do; and most patiently and earnestly he may strive to aid his pupils in the acquisition. The evil is in the system itself, which substitutes names for things; which fails to recognize the necessity of adapting the kind of instruction to the quality of the mind. This formidable array of names, and superficial amount of instruction, is required by the community, and he is compelled to meet the demand; this system is radically wrong—no effort of the teacher can make it right.

But is this formidable amount of English branches the only burdens laid upon the child? We have not yet spoken of the accomplishments! accomplishments to be acquired with great labor, to a superficial extent, and laid aside directly the serious duties of life commence. French, Latin, Italian, perhaps Spanish, German and Greek—I believe Hebrew is not introduced in this country—vocal and instrumental music, piano, harp, guitar, drawing, painting, and various kinds of fancy work, swell the increasing list. Now many of these pursuits are beautiful and useful in themselves, and would refine and elevate life if acquired at the *right time*, in the *right way*. But as studied at present, added on to the burdens of the young school-girl, their acquisition is not simply

useless; they consume much time, and thereby become highly injurious, by increasing still further the efforts of the mind, and preventing the slightest attention being given to the necessities of the body. The school-hour closes, the child returns home: not racing merrily along with shout and frolic—the little girl must not slide on the ice with boys—she must walk properly through the streets; she dines, and then there are lessons to be prepared for the next day: if she be a docile, obedient child, some hours will be spent in this preparation—if the instincts of nature are too strong, she will neglect the lessons, wander about the house, perhaps join in a game of play; and the next day she will suffer the penalty of a reproof from the teacher, for imperfect lessons, and the loss of her place in the class.

Perhaps the child is sent out to take a walk, on her return from school; but what is there attractive or invigorating in a walk through our streets? Can there be a more melancholy spectacle than a boarding school of girls, taking their afternoon walk? there is no vigor in their step, no pleasure in their eye; the fresh air is certainly good for their lungs, but the unattractive exercise is of the most questionable benefit.

There is little that is interesting to young girls in walking out without an object, they cannot play in the streets; their dress would be inconvenient; the mud and the carts, and the passengers, would prevent it. Children playing in the streets are nuisances; though we may watch with pleasure the lively moments of a group of boys, who have taken possession of a slippery pavement with their sleighs and skates, and though we would not for one moment dislodge them from their only play-ground—still they are out of place—and the unfitness would be still more striking, if the players were a group of girls, for there is an ideal of beauty in womanhood which may not be neglected, and our natural perception of fitness is always more outraged by coarse arrangements for girls than for boys. Our public squares do not afford the necessary opportunity for exercise. They are very few in number; they are public thoroughfares. Thus a quiet walk through the streets is the only resource for the young girls, and who can wonder that they find it more amusing to gaze in at shop windows, or lounge on the door step with young companions, or sit in a rocking-chair with a novel, than to take exercise in a dull street-walk. There is an entire neglect of all provision for the exercise of children in our city, that must not be overlooked by mothers. The ground has become so valuable, that the houses are crowded together; and with very few exceptions, the yards are laid out on the minutest pattern; exercise could not be taken in them, for they are the embodiment of dullness, shut in by brick walls; no room to run, hardly space for a swing. The old Dutch frame houses, that formerly stood in pleasant shaded gardens, on the little hills that diversified the island, have almost all disappeared: the island is fast becoming a dead level, and those pleasant gardens, with the wholesome breath of their trees and grass, have been dug away, with a short-sighted view of the greater profit to be derived from a row of brick houses. It is much to be re-

gretted that some of those fine old gardens had not been retained for the benefit of children!

There is then for the school-girl, after the long hours of unnatural confinement, no opportunity given for the healthy action of those bodily powers which are, as we have seen, of the first importance to the young, whose neglect is the source of prolonged suffering and incapacity. There is no relief to the over-taxed mind—no excitement to the body whose powers have been so completely repressed. The child wakes in the morning, to dress and take her breakfast, and hurry off to school again. And often the toilette is hastily performed, the duties of cleanliness and order neglected, and the breakfast quickly swallowed, in defiance of the necessities of the stomach, in fear of being too late.

The food given to children is generally unsuited to their age, both in quality and quantity; we do not draw the necessary distinction between the youthful and adult natures, and though I would not vindicate the wisdom of our own food, there can be no doubt that such articles as coffee, hot bread, mingled butter and molasses, rich or highly spiced dishes, pickles, wine, pastry, are far more injurious to the young than to the old. Their food should be of the best quality, and wholesome unadulterated articles should be carefully selected, but it should be a plain description of food, well, but simply cooked.

They should be cautioned from eating food too hot; and from swallowing it hastily and half chewed—these habits injure both teeth and stomach; they may be entirely prevented by a little care, and the opposite habit regularly formed, will be a powerful safeguard from dyspepsia in later life.

Neither should children be allowed to eat large quantities; they require, as I have elsewhere shown, more food proportionally than the adult—and this should be given to them at regular but more frequent intervals.

We greatly injure children by neglecting these rules. In the ordinary school hours, the child remains for seven hours without any proper meal, for the luncheon taken to school is often hastily put up, and consists of some improper article; the pickles and candy that children frequently carry to school with them, are hardly more wholesome than the chalk, India rubber, and slate pencils, that they chew in such large quantities.

Thus under the combined influences of confinement and close air, of unsuitable food, and injudicious mental excitement, the school days pass; under such influences the child changes from a girl into a woman: such is the foundation laid for the important duties of adult life!

If we were to sit down and carefully plan a system of education, which should injure the body, produce a premature and imperfect development of its powers, weaken the mind, and prepare the individual for future *uselessness*, we could hardly by any ingenuity construct a system more admirably calculated to produce these terrible results. The stimulus applied to the young minds, the emulation excited, the very interest with which they take in many of their studies, become a powerful means for weakening the body—if the minds were not so much exerted—if the children

were lazy or disobedient and would not learn, the same amount of mischief could not be done; but by their very conformity to rules, by striving to please their teachers and parents, and maintain an honorable position—they fall completely into the snare, and sin against nature, in exact proportion to their obedience to society!

It is in the boarding-school that this ruinous system of education attains its full force—for it is only there that the entire lives of the pupils are delivered up, for the time, to this one idea of so-called mental development. It is expected by the parents, that their children shall acquire so many branches and accomplishments in a given time; they are willing to pay high for the knowledge, but they will be much disappointed if the children do not display the worth of the money. To fulfil this expectation the teacher must utilize every moment, for the day is too short to get through the formidable list of studies. The time is laid out with the utmost regularity—early and late the child bends over her books or sits at the piano; the short time appropriated to exercise, is an interruption to the great business of the day, and is an unpleasant duty to all parties—for no child ever liked a boarding-school walk. The stimulus of rewards and punishments is freely applied, to urge on in the necessary direction—this stimulus is increased by the display of special exhibitions or examinations. The whole interest of the child is concentrated on its studies, for the distractions of home do not exist—the atmosphere of affection is not there, and if the moral tone of the school is good, study becomes its one idea.

I shall not speak of the frivolity and immorality which frequently exist in boarding-schools, though undoubtedly this association of children under such unnatural discipline, is calculated to weaken the moral sentiment, and produce a mental re-action in favor of weakness and folly. There is little religious influence exerted upon children at school. A formal prayer morning and evening, the repetition of Sunday's texts, or the occasional recital of a chapter in the Bible, is not the sort of instruction that will develop the religious nature of the child—the atmosphere which it breathes should be religious; it is only by the constantly exerted influence of religious natures, that children will grow in that direction. Frivolity and immorality are not necessarily connected with a well-conducted boarding-school; but the injury to the physical health is inevitable, it is a direct consequence of the system pursued, and too often the mind also is permanently weakened by the the very course adopted to strengthen it.

At 16, the girl's education, is often considered finished. At the very age, when, if a right system of physical and mental discipline had been pursued, she would have been prepared with a strong mind, in a strong body, to commence serious study, her education is pronounced finished, and she willingly lays aside her tasks to enter society more fully than was possible during the period of schooling. Henceforth pleasure is the chief object; for the plans that perhaps were formed, on leaving school, for reading and study, are never executed; the mind is not prepared to exert its powers alone. The knowledge already acquired has no connection

with her present life—her social nature needs companionship; and the temptations of society are too strong to be long resisted.

And what has been gained during these long years of school, at such a sacrifice of physical strength? The logic has not taught her to reason well on any subject—the mental and moral philosophy will furnish her no guide to goodness or happiness—the chemistry will never aid her in the preparation of wholesome food, or taking stains out of her furniture—the botany will not render more interesting the country rambles that she does not care to take. She will never use her natural philosophy to make the fire burn, or ventilate her house. These studies will be completely dropped and soon forgotten—for they were *learned too soon*—the mind could not retain—they were acquired too superficially, too impractically, to be of any use in strengthening the understanding, or aiding in daily life. The music may be useful in society, if there is any natural taste for it—if it is simply acquired with much drudgery, it will be at once dropped. The French will be of doubtful service—the young lady is too shy to speak it, if the occasion should present itself—if natural taste or circumstances induce her to persevere in its study, it may prove an elegant accomplishment, but, in general, that too is dropped. What then is made serviceable, out of the long list of studies—a little reading and writing (for it is very rare to find an elegant writer, still rarer, one who can read well aloud)—some arithmetic and the outlines of history and geography—this may be retained for life, and this is about all! Little *real knowledge* is gained, but an evil habit of mind has been acquired: a habit of careless, superficial thought, an inability to apply the mind closely to any subject—and *this habit* unfortunately cannot be dropped with the superficial acquirements which produced it. What a result is this, for years of time spent and much money surely we may call it a criminal waste of life!—*Lives of Life, with a Special Reference to the Physical Education of Girls.*